

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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ROME PASS TO VATICAN REP

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SCUL, EI
SUBJECT: NEW IRISH PRIMATE

1. THE PAPAL NUNCIO HERE HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE PRESIDENT OF MAYNOOTH COLLEGE, MONSIGNOR TOMAS O FIAICH, HAS BEEN NAMED AS ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH AND RPIMATE OF ALL IRELAND. SINCE 1887 ALL HOLDERS OF THIS POSITION HAVE ALSO LATER BEEN NAMED AS CARDINALS.

2. MONSIGNOR O FIAICH WAS A DARK HORSE IN THE MUCH DISCUSSED PROCESS OF CHOOSING A SUCCESSOR TO CARDINAL CONWAY, WHO DIED ON APRIL 17. THIS YEAR. O FIAICH IS 53, A NOTED SCHOLAR OF EARLY IRISH HISTORY, AND CONSIDERABLY MORE COSMOPOLITAN THAN MOST IRISH PRELATES - HE IS FLUENT IN FRENCH AND GERMAN.

3. IN THE LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE SPECTRUM O FIAICH SEEMS TO BE MILDLY CONSERVATIVE, THOUGH HE SEEMS TO BE A FLEXIBLE MAN. HE HAS RECEIVED SOME CRITICISM FROM LIBERAL QUARTERS FOR HIS HANDLING OF FACULTY RELATIONS AT ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE,
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MAYNOOTH. THE SACKING OF SOME INDIVIDUALS FOR STRAYING FROM STRICT CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY - ONE PRIEST-TEACHER WAS DISMISSED BECAUSE HE WOULD NOT WEAR THE PRIESTLY UNIFORM ON ALL OCCASIONS - LED TO AN UNUSUAL STRIKE BY THE STUDENTS AND SOME OF THE FACULTY. TO BE FAIR, IT IS NOT CLEAR JUST WHAT ROLE MONSIGNOR O FIAICH PLAYED IN THE TANGLED PROBLEMS AT MAYNOOTH. HIS RULING BOARD WAS THE

HIERARCHY OF IRELAND, A VERY CONSERVATIVE BODY.

4. THE ARCHBISHOP'S SEE IS LOCATED IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND HE IS THE PRIMATE OF THE 3.5 MILLION CATHOLICS IN ALL OF THE ISLAND. HE THUS PLAYS A RATHER IMPORTANT ROLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS. HE HAS DESCRIBED HIMSELF IN AN INTERVIEW AS A QUOTE NATIONALIST UNQUOTE AND BEING IN FAVOR OF THE EVENTUAL REUNIFICATION OF IRELAND. IN THE SAME INTERVIEW HE CATEGORICALLY CONDEMNED THE PROVISIONAL IRA AND ALSO QUOTE BRITISH ARMY VIOLENCE. UNQUOTE FROM ALL INDICATIONS IT WOULD APPEAR THAT HE WILL CONTINUE CARDINAL CONWAY'S POLICIES, BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL.

5. COMMENT: IN ADDITION TO HIS ROLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS, THE ARCHBISHOP'S ROLE IN THE REPUBLIC IS ALSO IMPORTANT. 95 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS CATHOLIC, AND OF THESE A RELIABLE POLL INDICATES THAT 94 PERCENT ATTEND MASS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK. DIVORCE IS AGAINST THE CONSTITUTION. DISPENSING CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES OR ADVICE IS ILLEGAL, EVEN FOR PROTESTANTS. ALL SCHOOLING IS SECTARIAN, AND THE CHURCH IS STRONGLY RESISTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ONE EXPERIMENTAL NON-SECTARIAN SCHOOL. WHEN THE IRISH HIERARCHY BARKS, THE IRISH GOVERNMENT USUALLY COMES TO IMMEDIATE ATTENTION. HOWEVER, PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN BOTH THE IRISH SOCIETY AND IN THE STILL-VERY-CONSERVATIVE CHURCH ARE BUILDING UP. THUS O FIAICH WILL HAVE NO EARY JOB.SHANNON

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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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